



Embargoed Until:
10:00 a.m. CST, Tuesday November 14, 2006
Web: www.mbda.gov/gulf

Contact: Tambra Stevenson
Phone: (202) 482-6274
Email: tstevenson@mbda.gov

New Business Center Opens in Louisiana to Help Minority Businesses Seek Contract Opportunities

New minority business center in partnership with City of Baton Rouge and New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS, L.A.—The Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, today marks the opening of the Louisiana Minority Business Opportunity Center (Louisiana MBOC) at a ribbon cutting ceremony. MBDA awarded the City of Baton Rouge a \$415,000 grant to open the new center. The MBOC will help minority businesses in the Gulf Region successfully compete for contracts as part of the federal, state and local efforts to rebuild the Region.

MBDA National Director Ronald N. Langston is joined by Mayor of Baton Rouge Melvin L. 'Kip' Holden, Mayor of New Orleans C. Ray Nagin, New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Chairman E. Frederick Preis and Louisiana MBOC Director Loretta Poree along with financial institutions, business associations, universities, and public officials for the grand opening event.

"The opening of the first MBDA funded Minority Business Opportunity Center in New Orleans reaffirms our commitment to Louisiana, its economy and to the minority business community," said the MBDA National Director Langston.

Housed in the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, the new Minority Business Opportunity Center will assist minority firms to access procurement opportunities. The center's services include assessing a company's potential to compete for public and private contracts, matching pre-qualified minority business enterprises with public and private sector contract opportunities, offering brokering services and assistance, providing access to buyers of goods and services and public and private procurement opportunities and assisting businesses in obtaining financing.

"This is the type of regional cooperation Louisiana must have to fully recover from last year's devastating hurricane season," Mayor Holden said. "In receiving this grant, Baton Rouge is a proud partner with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the City of New Orleans in helping minority businesses rebuild. This collaboration will enable us to connect business owners with the assistance available to get them back on their feet."

The center officially opened on October 1, 2006 and the grant was awarded to the City of Baton Rouge after a rigorous and competitive process. The Louisiana MBOC will operate in New Orleans with a satellite center in Baton Rouge as well.

Loretta Poree, formerly of the U.S. Small Business Administration, and selected as the new director of the Louisiana MBOC, said, "Under the leadership of Mr. Langston, the Louisiana

MBOC has become a reality and an extremely important asset in rebuilding the economic diversity of the Gulf region. I applaud MBDA for putting action behind its words in rebuilding our local economy that will have a national impact.”

Like MBDA, the Center’s performance will be measured by its ability to connect minority businesses with public and private contracts. Strategic partners will play a key role in the success of the Center and to date Liberty Bank, Louisiana State University, Louisiana Minority Business Council, New Orleans Black Chamber of Commerce, New Orleans Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Southern University have pledged their support.

“Based on research done by Concordia University in Minnesota, as recently as 2002, minority-owned firms in Louisiana represented an annual payroll of \$1.1 billion, with buying power of close to \$9 billion just in Orleans, Jefferson, and East Baton Rouge Parishes. This is a significant part of the fabric and economy of this region and the MBDA is a significant step toward re-establishing and growing this industry sector,” stated E. Fredrick Preis, Jr., Board Chairman of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce.

Today’s event included an open house, a ribbon cutting ceremony, a demonstration of MBDA’s online business resource tools, including its Capital Locator, Business Locator and Phoenix Opportunity database, and a presentation of available services to minority businesses.

“Increasing our physical presence in the Gulf region has been a priority since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita swept through this area last fall,” said MBDA National Director Langston. “MBDA was on the ground immediately working with displaced minority business owners and we are committed to being here for the long haul rebuilding a stronger minority business enterprise community for the Gulf region and for America.”

To date, MBDA has assisted over 340 displaced minority firms to prepare and submit applications for disaster relief, emergency loans and insurance claims; reconstructed business plans and other key business documents; assisted approximately 1,127 minority firms with the identification of procurement opportunities; conducted education and outreach activities reaching more than 4,000 minority business enterprises; and vetted over 1,181 firms as viable minority firms with capacity to participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans.

About the Minority Business Development Agency, US Department of Commerce

Founded in 1971 and headquartered in Washington, DC, the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. MBDA is the only federal agency created specifically to foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses in this Nation. The Agency actively promotes the strategic growth and competitiveness of minority business enterprises by offering management and technical assistance and access to contracting and financing opportunities through a network of forty local business centers throughout the United States.